

SECTION 13 C- Receiving, Handling, Storing, and Monitoring Sterile Supplies

I. PURPOSE.

Sterile supplies must be received and stored in a manner to protect them from contamination and monitored to assure that expired or contaminated items are not used. The purpose of this policy is to provide specific guidelines for receiving, handling, storing, and monitoring sterile supplies.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES.

A. Each ward, clinic, service, ancillary activity and department at DHCS has an Infection Control SOP. The OIC and NCOIC will ensure that all assigned personnel are familiar with and adhere to correct policy and procedures.

B. CMS processes and sterilizes medical supplies and special technical equipment for the care and treatment of patients in using units. Using units will provide a limited access, meticulously clean environment for the control, safekeeping and storage of sterile supplies.

III. HANDLING STERILE INSTRUMENTS AND SUPPLIES.

A. The sterile and clean storage environment shall be designed and controlled to prevent contamination of sterile medical/surgical items.

B. Decontamination should be physically separated from sterile and clean items.

C. Steps must be taken to prevent the mingling of sterile packs with nonsterile supplies. Storage of sterile and non-sterile items should be located in separate shelves/cabinets clearly labeled contaminated.

D Handling of sterile packages or trays must be kept at a minimum to reduce chances for contamination. Packages must that are dropped on the floor, compressed, torn or become wet must be considered contaminated.

E. Sterilization tapes on outside of packs or trays verify that items have been processed through sterilizer when dark stripes appear on tapes.

IV. LOCATION AND STORAGE OF STERILE INSTRUMENTS AND SUPPLIES.

A. Sterile supplies shall kept in a separate, enclosed, limited-access area, the only function of which is to store sterile and clean supplies.

B. A controlled, clean, environment shall be maintained at all times. The area shall be free of moisture, dust, and vermin. Diligent housekeeping is essential. There should be daily cleaning and disinfection of horizontal work surfaces. Floors should be cleaned daily and when necessary. Other surfaces such as walls and shelving should be cleaned on a regularly scheduled basis.

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C. Warehouse boxes will not be stored in sterile storage areas.

D. Sterile packs and trays should be kept off the floor in a dry, low-dust, low-traffic area and away from sinks, sewer, or water pipes, and dust producing activities. The top shelves should be a minimum of 18 inches from ceiling fixtures so as not to interfere with sprinklers. Sterile supplies are preferably kept in enclosed shelved cabinets. This will prevent items from becoming wet with splashed water, floor cleaning products, and condensation. Storage away from heat sources prevents packages material from becoming brittle.

E. Sterile items must be placed on specifically labelled shelves and rotated properly so that the oldest dated articles are first to be used, and the newest dated items are placed last. Shelf life of sterile packages is the period of time during which sterility is assumed to be maintained. However, shelf life is primarily event related and depends upon maintenance of the integrity of the packaging.

F. Placing sterile packages in drawers is not recommended. Drawer storage systems present strong potential for contamination by compromising the integrity of the package as well as cross contamination as a result of excessive handling.

V. GENERAL.

A. Expiration dates are to closely monitored on all sterile supplies. Outdated supplies shall be returned to CMS or destroyed by date indicated on the item.

B. An adequate inventory of sterile supplies must be maintained in order to avoid crowding on shelves and excessive outdating.

C. Commercially prepared sterile items which do not have a specified date and are labelled by the manufacturer as sterile shall be considered sterile until used or the integrity of the package has been compromised. (Note: Oldest items are to be used first and newest items are to be placed last).

D. Sterile supplies which are damp, or which have fallen to the floor, or otherwise contaminated shall be sent immediately to CMS for reprocessing.

E. As sterile supplies and commercially packaged items are being shelved, inspect each item for lot number, expiration date, and integrity of package - holes, tears, open ends, loose tape.

1. Supplies with torn, compressed or otherwise damaged packaging will not be used. Such items are considered contaminated and must be returned to CMS for reprocessing. Check outside tape for proper color change and indicators inside packages.

F. On a weekly basis, shelves must be damp dusted with a hospital approved disinfectant. As supplies are removed from shelf, they should be visually inspected. Outdated items and packages whose sterility is questionable or has been compromised must be returned to CMS decontamination unit for reprocessing.